

2023 Communications Survey Results Town of Arlington, MA

"Town website is very comprehensive and easy to navigate." - survey respondent

"Quality and content of email communications is very high." - survey respondent

"Generally doing a good job communicating, and always trying to improve. Bravo." - survey respondent

Report Structure

- Introduction and demographics. p. 2
- Executive summary and action items. p. 3-4
- Complete survey results with brief narratives and respondent quotes. p. 5-18

Compiled by Joan Roman, Public Information Officer

2023 COMMUNICATIONS SURVEY RESULTS

Introduction

The Town conducts periodic surveys to measure satisfaction of its public communications via its many communication channels. Resident feedback has always guided the direction of future enhancements and improvements in Town communications and its related systems. In this survey, feedback was sought on the Town's website, arlingtonma.gov, Town Notices (email), the Request/Answer Center, Arlington Alerts, and preferred methods of notification for non-emergency communications. This survey was conducted for six weeks in early 2023.

This survey is the fifth such survey in nine years. Some comparisons are included in this report to help the Town identify trends, expectations, and respondent's perceptions.

The survey received 1,548 responses to the 22-question survey, the most the Town has received for a communications survey. The last survey in 2021 received 579 responses. The increase in respondents is likely due to this year's survey being sent to Arlington Alert text and email subscribers. Over 600 respondents used this method to take the survey.

The Town would like to thank survey participants for their valuable feedback. Their participation provides valuable insight and guidance to assist the Town's ongoing online communication efforts. The Town would also like to thank staff for their continued input and efforts in providing timely and accurate information to the Arlington community. Although there is always room for improvement, the survey results indicate there is a lot the Town is doing right with respect to communicating with the public and staff should take pride in their efforts in this regard.

Main Action Items at a Glance

- Explore expanded use of Arlington Alerts for non-emergency notifications (text/email).
- Invest in education/promotion about online communication options. Many respondents are not aware of the Request/Answer Center and the video "Updates" provided by the Town.
- Email is by far the preferred method cited by respondents, increase education and subscriptions to Town Notices currently at 6,247 subscribers.
- Review survey results with content posters and communication stakeholders.
- Review Request/Answer Center reports and response rates to identify areas of improvement and take appropriate action to remedy, as possible.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Executive Summary is broken out by communication channels with a brief narrative and action items on the next two pages. Full survey results may be found on the following pages.

Town Notices (email) & Email List Management

984 respondents who reported receiving Town Notices are highly engaged with them with 75% reporting they read nearly all or most of each email. A large proportion of respondents, 78%, reported that the frequency of Town Notices is just about right, down from 83% since the 2021 survey. 90% of respondents reported they feel “Very informed” or “Informed,” down from 94% in 2021. 78% of respondents report the frequency of Town Notices is just about right, a 5% dip from the 2021 survey. 10% felt Town Notice emails are too frequent, while 3% reported they are not sent often enough. As in prior years’ surveys, respondents continue to report that Town Notices are a preferred method to be informed about Town initiatives and activities.

The Town’s vendor migrated the Town’s email list management to a new platform in early 2022. The survey queried respondents on how the new email list management tools worked. Out of 196 respondents 88% reported they were satisfied with the new email list management function, 6% were not satisfied, and 18% had no opinion.

Action: Better publicize Town Notices to increase subscriptions, although most respondents are satisfied with current frequency, a dip in satisfaction informs us to be mindful of frequency to avoid email fatigue.

Video Updates

In partnership with Arlington Community Media, Inc. (ACMi), the Town started a series of video programming during the pandemic to provide timely “Updates” to the public. Starting with weekly COVID-19 Updates, which evolved into a series of Updates from different Town departments, including Town Hall Updates (generally Town Manager), DPCD Updates (Department of Planning & Community Development), DEI Updates (Diversity, Equity & Inclusion), and APD Updates (Arlington Police Department). 297 respondents reported to have watched one or more of these updates, with most having watched Town Hall Updates. (249) In all video categories, 95%, or more, of respondents reported feeling “well informed or informed.”

Action: Improve promotion around these content offerings.

Arlington Alerts

The question about Arlington Alerts was meant to understand if residents would want to be alerted to non-emergency notifications via text and email. Through the Arlington Alert system, text and email may be sent by the Town without additional cost through our vendor. The majority of respondents preferred these methods for all scenarios listed in the survey. The implementation challenge is two-fold. Resources to implement these notification methods and outreach to encourage residents to provide their text and email

information. The Arlington Alert system is an opt-in system. Currently the system has about approximately 3,700 text subscribers and 4,200 email subscribers out of approximately 19,000 households.

Action: Explore internal resources to expand use of Arlington Alert system for non-emergency notifications via text and email. Develop promotion and incentives for residents to sign up and provide their email and/or text information.

Communication Preferences

Email is clearly the preferred method by respondents (87%) followed by text messaging (40%). 11% of respondents selected Facebook as a preference, 8% chose Local Online Newspapers, 6% phone, 4% Twitter, and 4% ACMi broadcast. The strong preference of text messages gives the Town a method to further explore. The Town currently uses this method infrequently as subscriptions are low.

Action: Explore expanded use of Arlington Alerts (see previous). The Town will continue to provide content to all communication channels listed (social, local online newspapers, and ACMi), but it is helpful to know resident preferences as the availability of these channels may change. For example, if Twitter ceases to be a viable method to support or a local online newspaper ceases to exist.

Measuring Request/Answer Center Satisfaction

492 respondents reported the process to submit a request satisfactory (86%), while 5% reported the process to be not satisfactory and 5% no opinion. For timeliness for a written response to a request, 75% of respondents reported satisfaction, while 14% reported they were not satisfied and 13% had no opinion. For timeliness of work being performed 60% of respondents reported satisfaction, while 14% reported they were not satisfied, and 26% had no opinion. While it is difficult to quantify the reasons why satisfaction rates are lower, it is important to note that in the current market it is difficult to hire municipal workers. Public Works, which perform most of the requests submitted to the Request/Answer Center has been working with an 11% vacancy rate, which may be a contributing factor to their ability to respond to requests, or to perform the request, in a timely manner.

Action: Review Request/Answer Center reports and response rates to identify areas of improvement and take appropriate action to remedy, as possible.

SURVEY RESULTS

Methodology

The survey was conducted via Survey Monkey and publicized on the Town's website, Town Notices, local media, ACMi, social media channels, and via Arlington Alerts (email and text)

Demographic Information

Number of respondents (in parentheses).

Number of respondents: 1,548 respondents to a 22-question survey

Residents vs. non-resident (1,454): 98% (1,431) residents; 2% (23) non-residents.

Work in Arlington (1,454): 22% (322) yes; 78% (1,132) no.

Arlington Business Owners (1,454): 9% (51) yes; 91% (1,132) no.

Demographics (1,454): 22% (327) respondents are between the ages of 45-54; 21% (304) are between 65-74; 20% (285) are between 55-64; 18% (261) are between 35-44; 8% (116) are between 75-84; 8% (111) are 25-34; 1% (14) are over 85; .4% (5) under 25; and 2% (31) prefer not to answer.

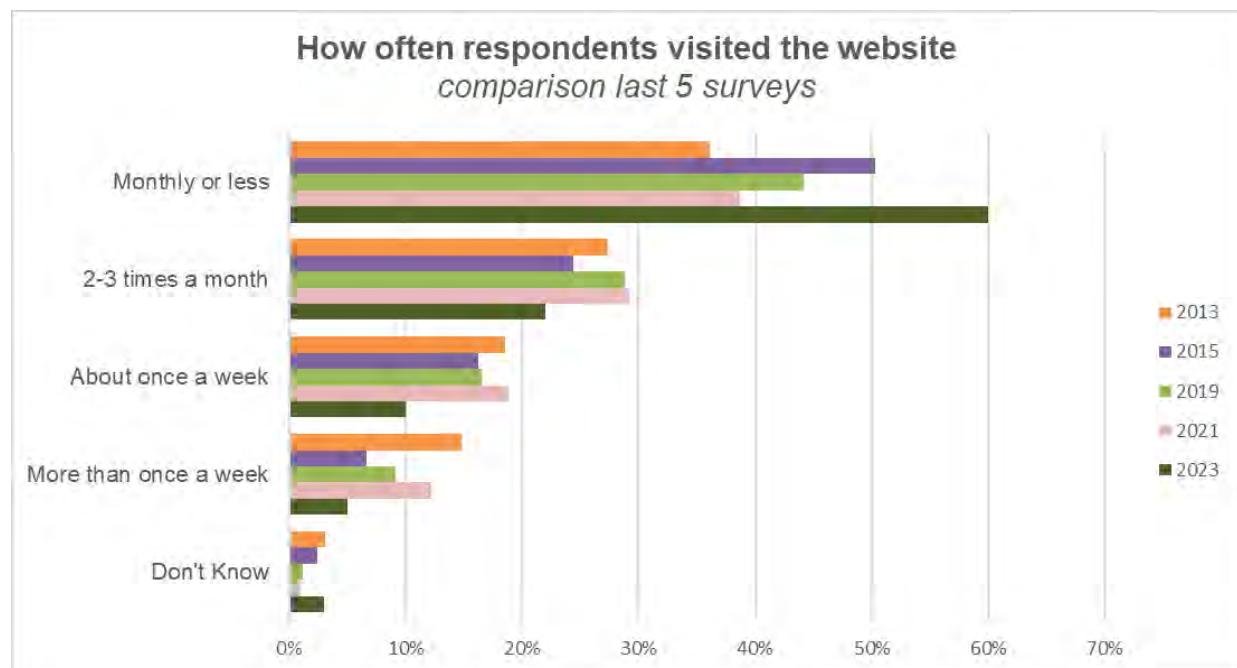
Frequency of Visits to Town Website

1,548 Respondents, 0 Skipped

Most respondents report they visit the website monthly or less (60%), with 22% reporting they visit 2-3 times per month and 10% visit about once per week. 5% percent report they visit more than once per week.

Comparison From Last Five Surveys

Comparing respondent answers over the last 5 surveys (below). Overall, respondents are visiting the website with less frequency than reported in previous surveys, however, website traffic continues to be robust. In 2022 the Town website received 1.9M page views and 810K sessions, not quite to back to pre-pandemic levels of 1.6M page views and 604K sessions in 2019¹.



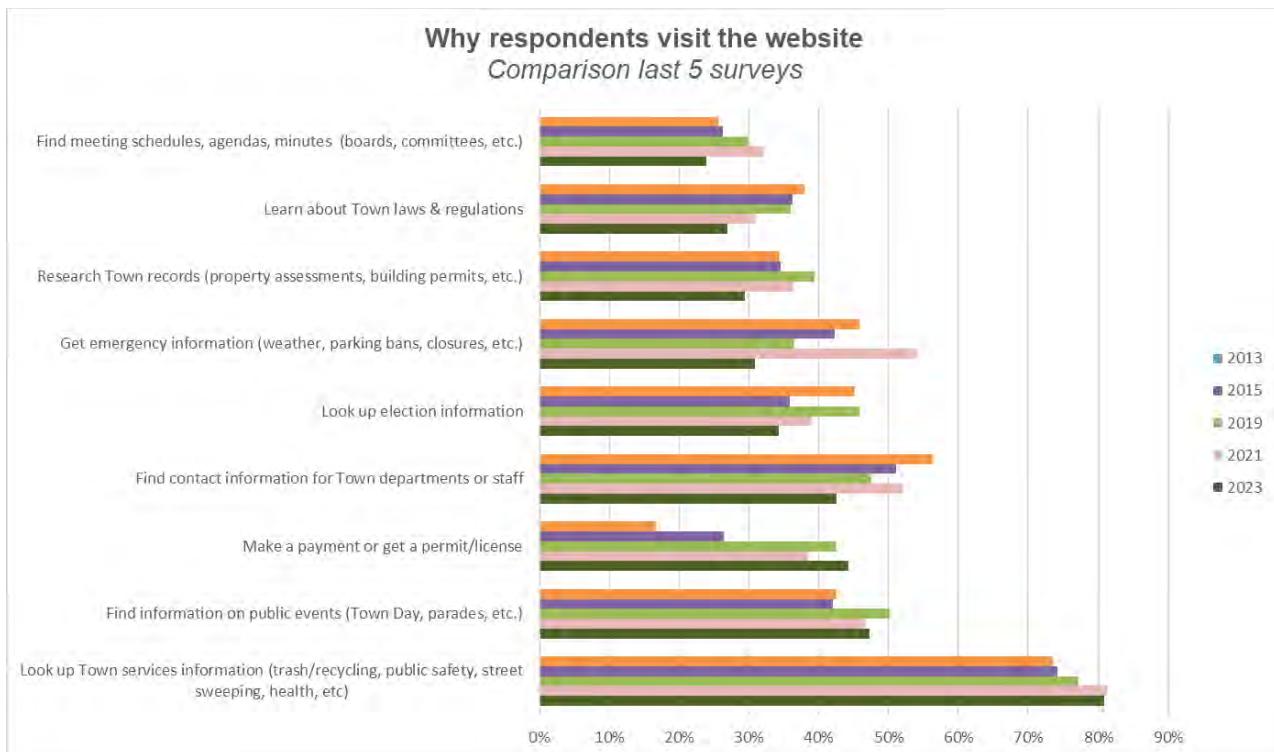
¹2022 Annual Town Report, p. 9

Why Respondents Visit the Town's Website

1,548 Respondents, 0 Skipped

Comparison From Last Five Surveys

As shown in the charts below, “Look up Town services” continues to be the top reason visitors come to the website (81%), followed by “To find information on public events” (47%), and “To make payments or apply for a permit” (44%). Finding contact information continues to be of high interest to website visitors.



Town Notices

[Town Notices](#) are email notifications issued by the Town. They typically include public health and public works alerts, election information, office closures, trash and recycling alerts, and information on Town events.

Do you currently receive Town Notice emails?

1,495 Respondents, 53 skipped

66.29% (991) | Yes

24.68% (369) | No

9% (135) | Not Sure

Those who answered “yes” to the previous question were asked:

On average, what proportion of Town Notice emails do you read?

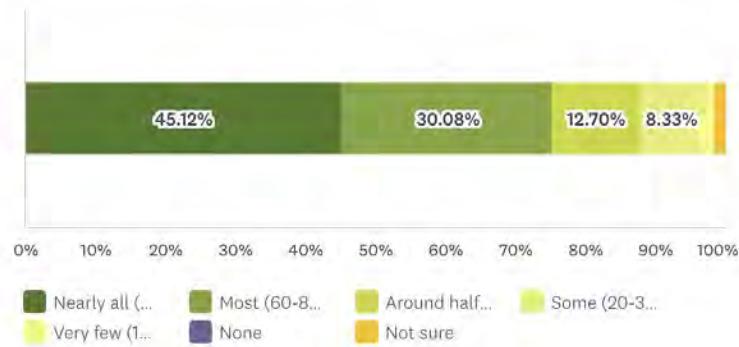
984 respondents

75% (740) reported they read “Nearly all” or “Most” (60-100%)

13% (125) reported they read “Around half” of them (40-59%)
11% (104) reported they read “Some” or “very few” (1-19%)

On average, what proportion of a Town Notice email do you read?

Answered: 984 Skipped: 564



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Nearly all (90-100%)	45.12%
Most (60-89%)	30.08%
Around half (40-59%)	12.70%
Some (20-39%)	8.33%
Very few (1-19%)	2.24%
None	0.00%
Not sure	1.52%
TOTAL	984

Frequency of Town Notices

984 Respondents, 564 Skipped

78% | About the right amount (83% in 2021)

10% | Too much (8% in 2021)

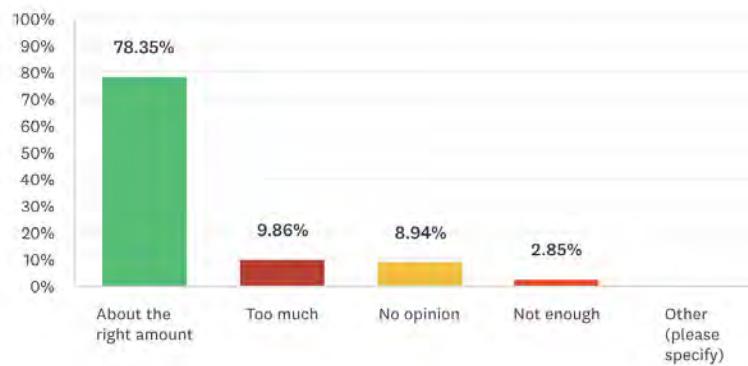
3% | Not enough (2% in 2021)

9% | No opinion (7% in 2021)

A large percentage of respondents (78%) report the frequency of Town Notices is just about right, a 5% dip from the 2021 survey, but still a healthy number. 10% felt Town Notice emails are too frequent, while 3% reported they are not sent often enough.

How would you categorize the frequency of Town Notice emails?

Answered: 984 Skipped: 564



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
About the right amount	78.35%
Too much	9.86%
No opinion	8.94%
Not enough	2.85%
Other (please specify)	0.00%
TOTAL	984

How Informed Respondents Are About Town Initiatives/Activities

984 Respondents

90% | Very informed / Informed (94% in 2019)

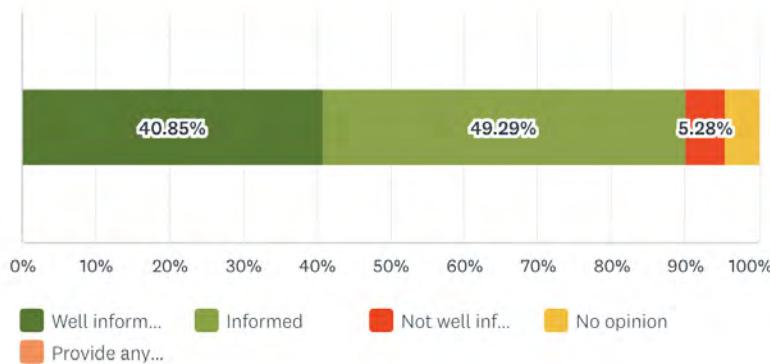
5% | Not well Informed (4% in 2019)

5% | No opinion (2% in 2019)

90% of residents report feeling informed or well informed about Town activities, news and initiatives. This represents a 4% decline from the last survey. 5% respondents reporting feeling "Not well informed" or had "no opinion."

Please indicate how informed Town Notice emails keep you about Town activities, news, and initiatives.

Answered: 984 Skipped: 564



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Well informed	40.85% 402
Informed	49.29% 485
Not well informed	5.28% 52
No opinion	4.57% 45
Provide any comments you have about Town Notices. What you may like about them or how we can improve them.	Responses 0.00% 0
TOTAL	984

Respondent Comments

"Email summaries are always informative."

"Town announcements are good notifying about important meetings, events, etc."

"Thank goodness for Arlington Notices. They are a big help now that the Arlington Advocate has been merged with the Winchester Star into a useless quasi-newspaper."

Email List Manager

979 Respondents, 569 skipped

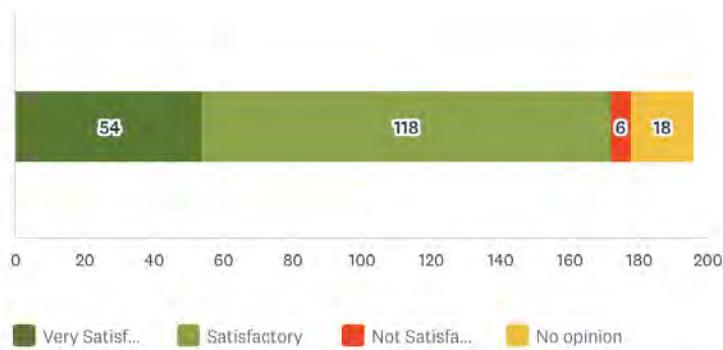
In March 2022 we moved our email lists to the govDelivery platform, which provides improved email management. Have you used the Town of Arlington Email List Manager? It's where you would add/remove your preferences to different email subscription lists from the Town.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ Yes	19.92% 195
▼ No	53.01% 519
▼ Not sure	27.07% 265
TOTAL	979

172 respondents (88%) reported to be satisfied with the new Email List Manager.

How would you rate the Email Manager?

Answered: 196 Skipped: 1,352



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ Very Satisfactory	27.55% 54
▼ Satisfactory	60.20% 118
▼ Not Satisfactory	3.06% 6
▼ No opinion	9.18% 18
Total Respondents: 196	

Video Updates

297 Respondents

In partnership with Arlington Community Media, Inc. (ACMi), the Town started a series of video programming during the pandemic to provide timely “Updates” to the public. We started with weekly COVID-19 Updates then evolved into a series of Updates from different Town departments. Have you watched any of these video updates?

Respondents that reported watching video updates reported high marks for feeling informed after watching them. In all categories “feeling informed” or “very informed” was over 95%.

297 respondents reported on how informed they felt after watching these updates:

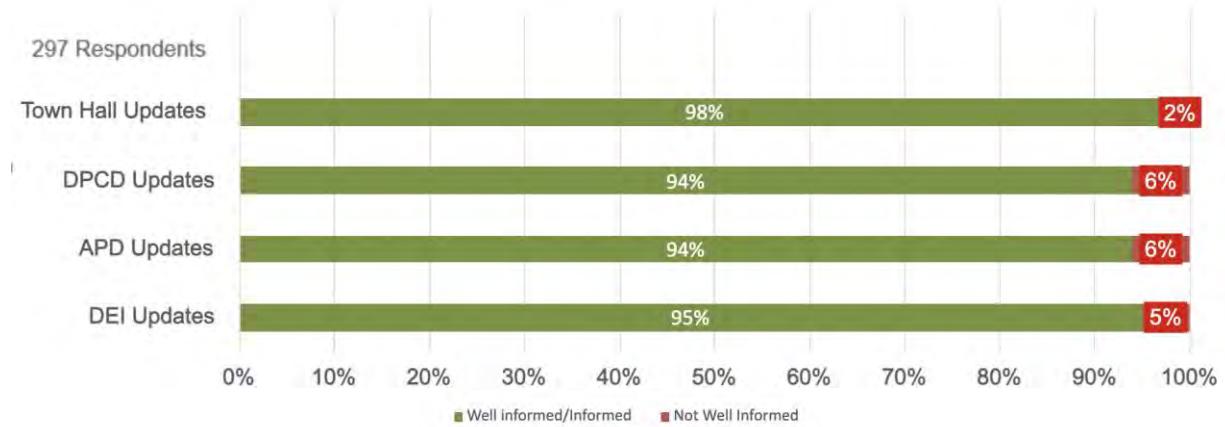
Town Hall Updates: 98% Informed | 2% Not Well Informed | 249 Respondents

DPCD Updates: 94% Informed | 6% Not Well Informed | 121 Respondents

APD Updates: 94% Informed | 6% Not Well Informed | 88 Respondents

DEI Updates: 95% Informed | 5% Not Well Informed | 101 Respondents

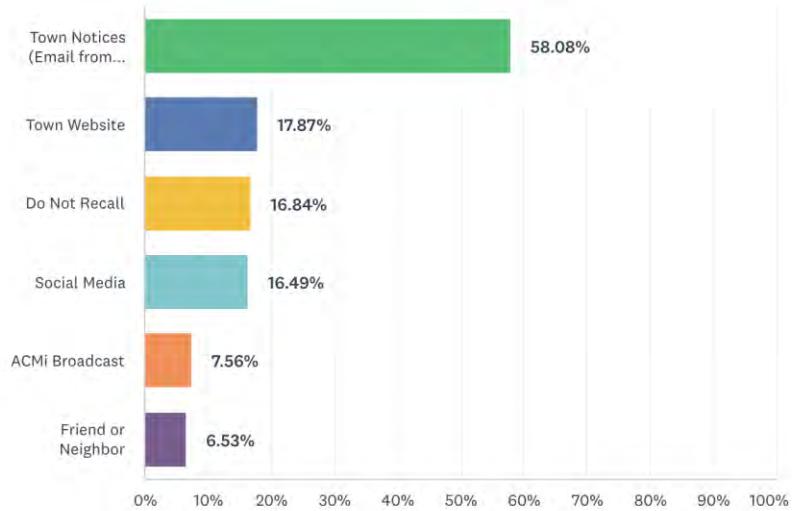
Video Updates
How Informed Respondents Reported



	WELL INFORMED	INFORMED	NOT WELL INFORMED	HAVE NOT WATCHED	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
▼ Town Hall Updates (usually given by Town Manager)	38.41% 111	47.75% 138	1.73% 5	12.11% 35	289	1.88
▼ DPCD Updates (Department of Planning and Community Development)	16.54% 43	27.31% 71	2.69% 7	53.46% 139	260	2.93
▼ APD Updates (Arlington Police Department)	14.12% 36	18.43% 47	1.96% 5	65.49% 167	255	3.19
▼ DEI Updates (Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Division of Health & Human Services)	18.99% 49	18.22% 47	1.94% 5	60.85% 157	258	3.05

How did you learn about video updates from the Town? Check all that apply.

Answered: 291 Skipped: 1,257



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Town Notices (Email from Town)	58.08% 169
Town Website	17.87% 52
Do Not Recall	16.84% 49
Social Media	16.49% 48
ACMi Broadcast	7.56% 22
Friend or Neighbor	6.53% 19

Respondent Comments

"I started watching during covid situation. Felt it was very informative and I would love to have some continued high-level videos of major things going on in Arlington to continue to keep informed."

"Love the Town Manager updates. I appreciate the background explanations for projects and issues town is working on. Helps me feel better informed. They really help me feel like I know the town officials a bit better, and that they probably know what they are doing."

"I have really appreciated the video updates. It also helps me to get a sense of who people are (like Town Manager)."

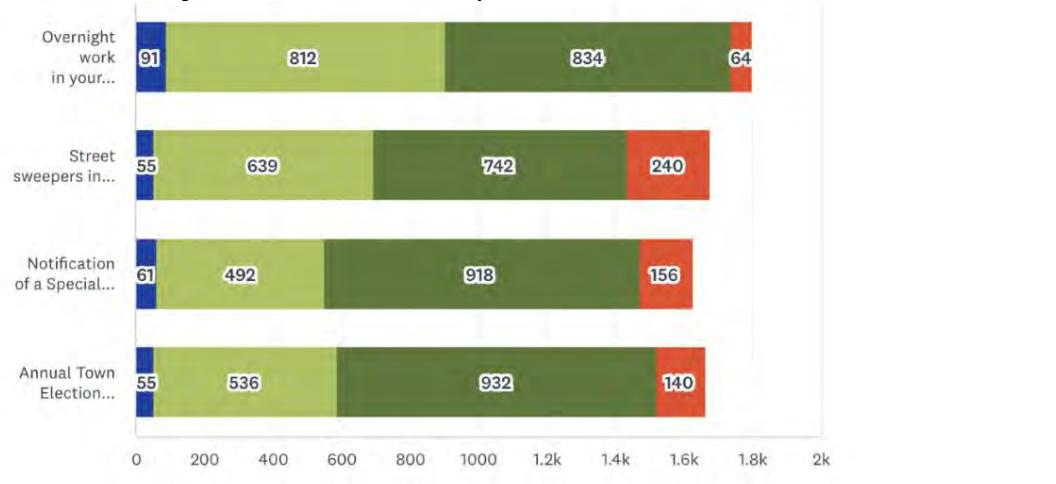
"I think the information provided is helpful but wish they took less time."

"Email updates are preferable to video updates"

Arlington Alerts

1,450 Respondents, 98 Skipped

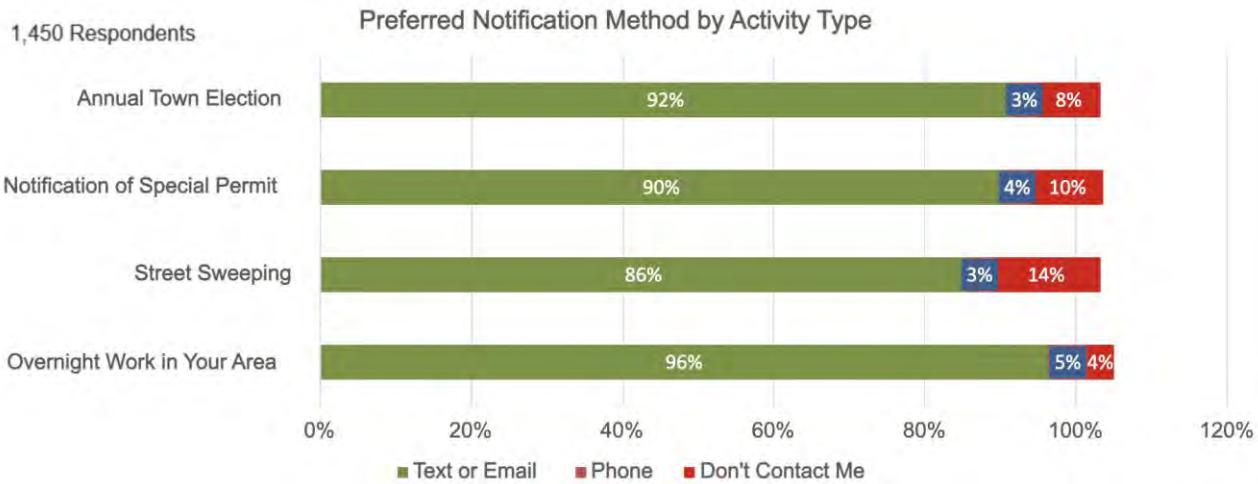
The Arlington Alert System allows the Town to send town-wide and targeted phone, text, and email notifications during an emergency or major public impacts. Because of the targeting abilities the Town is exploring expanded use of the system for NON-EMERGENCY work. Please view some example Town activities we might initiate an Arlington Alert and note your communication preferences for each.



■ Phone Me ■ Text Me ■ Email Me ■ Don't Contact Me

	PHONE ME	TEXT ME	EMAIL ME	DON'T CONTACT ME FOR THIS WORK TYPE	TOTAL RESPONDENTS
Overnight work in your neighborhood.	6.29% 91	56.12% 812	57.64% 834	4.42% 64	1,447
Street sweepers in your neighborhood	3.83% 55	44.50% 639	51.67% 742	16.71% 240	1,436
Notification of a Special Permit in your neighborhood.	4.25% 61	34.31% 492	64.02% 918	10.88% 156	1,434
Annual Town Election Reminder	3.84% 55	37.43% 536	65.08% 932	9.78% 140	1,432

Text and email methods are merged in this analysis below as these methods may be used for non-emergency notifications without additional cost through our vendor. Clearly there is a desire to receive notifications through these methods. The Town also has a desire to deliver targeted text and emails. However, the Arlington Alert system is an opt-in system that requires users to provide the Town with their text and email information. About 4,000 users have provided this information out of approximately 19,000 households.



To successfully expand the use of this system, the Town would need to identify resources and develop policy to deliver these notifications on a consistent basis. It would also need to promote and incentivize residents to provide their text and email information.

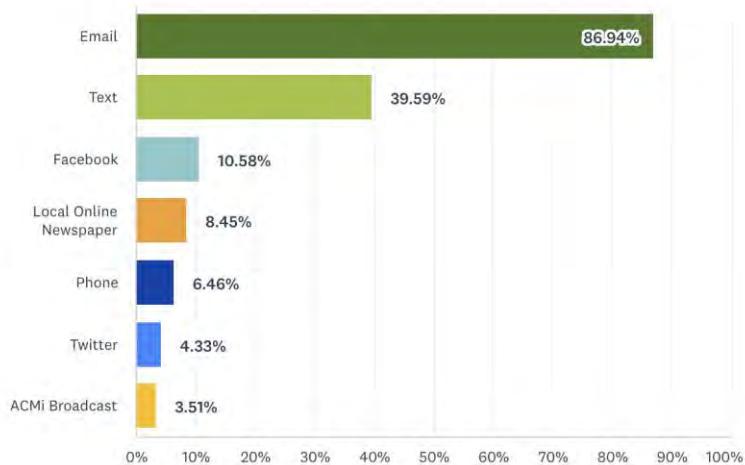
Communication Preferences

Answered: 1,455

We are always seeking ways to better inform the public about a variety of Town activities, initiatives, and events while also being efficient with our resources. Below we'd like you to pick your preferred methods to receive general, non-emergency notifications from the Town. Select all that apply.

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Answered: 1,455 Skipped: 93



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Email	86.94%
Text	39.59%
Facebook	10.58%
Local Online Newspaper	8.45%
Phone	6.46%
Twitter	4.33%
ACMi Broadcast	3.51%

Total Respondents: 1,455

Email is clearly the preferred method by respondents (87%) followed by text messaging (40%), which is seldom used. 11% of respondents selected Facebook as a preference, 8% chose Local Online Newspapers, 6% phone, 4% Twitter, and 4% ACMi broadcast. The strong preference of text messages gives the Town a method to further explore as it currently uses this method infrequently. The Town will continue to provide content to these other methods. It is helpful to know resident preferences as these other methods may change in the future. Example Twitter ceases to be a viable method to support or a local media organization goes out of business.

Measuring Request/Answer Center Satisfaction

492 Respondents, 1,056 skipped

86% satisfactory | 8% not satisfactory – process to submit via the system (5% No Opinion/Do Not Recall)

75% satisfactory | 14% not satisfactory – timeliness of written response to request (13% No Opinion / Do Not Recall)

60% satisfactory | 14% not satisfactory – timeliness of the work being performance (26% No Opinion / Do Not Recall)

Thinking about your overall experience interacting with Arlington's Request/Answer Center, describe your satisfaction levels on the following:

Answered: 492 Skipped: 1,056



	VERY SATISFACTORY	SATISFACTORY	NOT SATISFACTORY	NO OPINION / DO NOT RECALL	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Process to submit your request using the online system.	38.09% 187	48.27% 237	8.35% 41	5.30% 26	491	1.81
Timeliness of the written response to your request.	29.80% 146	42.65% 209	14.08% 69	13.47% 66	490	2.11
Timeliness of the work being performed.	21.56% 105	38.81% 189	13.76% 67	25.87% 126	487	2.44

Residents were asked to comment on what we are doing well and where we could improve in our Communications.

What are we doing well?

“Proactive communications at the right levels.”

“So much! Communication, variety of events and services, appreciate the range of recycling options and programs and the environmental initiatives. Thank you!”

“Website appears fairly organized and streamlined. I have been able to find PDF documents for Select Board, School Committee, and Arlington Redevelopment Board agendas fairly easily.”

“Site is very well organized plenty of info, updates, organized, thought out, public forums.”

“Transparency in communications. Reaching out to residents regularly for feedback.”

“Quality and content of email communications is very high.”

“Town website is very comprehensive and easy to navigate.”

“Website, town alerts via email, etc. work well for those who know to use/sign up for them.”

“Website is very useful and fairly easy to navigate. Town notice emails are always informative and the emergency alerts work great.”

“Easy to subscribe to meeting notices; the town emails with updates are great at giving a heads up and then giving a link for those who want more information.”

“The volume is actually ok for the emails. I like the consideration of geographic targeting of emails for street sweeping.”

“The town email updates are brief and great and link to more information for those who are interested. Keep up the good work!”

Town Response: Thanks for the kind comments. We work hard to provide useful communications and creatively to do so in a financially responsible manner.

Where is there room for improvement?

“The Meetings and Agendas page needs to be easier to navigate. It would also be great if emails about town board meetings had links or direct file attachments directly in the email with the zoom info.”

Town Response: We will review with our content posters to see if we can provide direct file and zoom links in the email, if not direct file links, direct page links.

“I would like text/email notices of planned water shutoffs in my area with an ETA for repairs. I understand you may not always know the eta.”

Town Response: The Town has been piloting sending text and emails via the Arlington Alert system for about a year. If you are not subscribed to Arlington Alerts, you may do so at arlingtonma.gov/arlingtonalerts

“I get a lot of emails and feeling some email fatigue. Secondly, why not run a couple of sessions and record them as well with a tutorial on website, communications available. I would find that valuable and grounding.”

Town Response: Trying to balance the frequency of emails is top of mind, but some weeks are harder than others. Regarding video tutorials, the Town will look into creating short, video tutorials on how to sign up for email alerts, Arlington Alerts, and other explainer videos. Thanks for making the suggestion.

“More and more town updates seem to be done via video now--town manager updates, etc. I don't like watching videos, but then I miss the information. Not sure if transcripts would work well, and I imagine some people prefer videos to text, but for me, it means I don't get some of the information.”

Town Response: The Town will review the resources necessary to provide video transcripts. We remind viewers that all video Updates are sent in a Town Notice email, which includes a corresponding summary and link to full information, often more information than what is covered in the Update. On the video page we include topics with time codes so you can jump to the topic of choice, followed by links to pages with full information on topics covered.

“It would be helpful for the town to publish a list of resources available to residents (or an index), some of which were mentioned in this survey. I wasn't aware of many of them and I'm a fairly new (less than 5 years) resident.”

Town Response: The Town has a “Connect” page on its website which may be found on its main navigation. The Connect page lists all Town communication and customer service channels.